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End the Tobacco Problem Now

IOM Report Calls for Smoking Bans, Cigarette Taxes, Funded Prevention Program

The nation's top medical advisers Thursday recommended strong policies to put an end to smoking-related disease, the nation's costliest and most preventable health problem.

The National Institute of Medicine released a report that says smoking could be dramatically reduced and even eliminated if states – and Congress – had the political will. It recommended every state institute indoor smoking bans in workplaces, place higher taxes on tobacco and fund prevention programs in a report called *Ending the Tobacco Problem: A Blueprint for the Nation*, a report released by the Institute of Medicine.

“This is the triple play to prevent children from smoking – indoor smoking bans, a tax on cigarettes to make them more expensive for children to purchase, and tobacco prevention programs,” Maureen Busalacchi, executive director of Smoke Free Wisconsin said.

Over 8,000 people in Wisconsin die from smoking each year. Second-hand smoke killed three times more people in Wisconsin than drunk driving in 2005, the last year of available data.

The cost of treating smoking-related disease in Wisconsin alone is \$2 billion, with another \$2 billion lost in worker productivity, according to the state Division of Public Health.

The report also recommends aggressive counter-marketing media campaigns aimed at youth, helping smokers quit, community involvement in reducing smoking, and stronger federal regulation of tobacco products.

“We have an opportunity to get Wisconsin on the right course in preventing youth smoking,” said Busalacchi. “Raise the tax on cigarettes, pass the Breathe Free Wisconsin Act, and fully fund anti-tobacco programs by setting up a permanent endowment.”

A statewide Breathe Free Wisconsin Act, now before the state Legislature, would require all businesses, including restaurants and bars to restrict smoking to outside their buildings. A Senate committee will hold a public hearing on the bill May 31.

Breathing secondhand smoke causes heart disease and lung cancer. It increases the risk for sudden infant death syndrome, acute respiratory infections, middle-ear disease, worsened asthma, respiratory symptoms, and slowed lung growth in children. The U.S. Surgeon General, appointed by President Bush, said there is no safe level of second hand smoke. Ever.

Busalacchi said, “People have a right to breathe clean indoor air, especially bartenders, waiters and waitresses who, throughout Wisconsin, are constantly exposed to heavy exposure of cancer-causing chemicals in secondhand smoke.”

Statewide, nearly two-thirds of voters support clean indoor air laws. And virtually the state’s entire entertainment and hospitality industry supports the Act,

including the Wisconsin Restaurant Association and the state's hotels and visitors bureaus. The Wisconsin Tavern League opposes community smoking bans because it says they create unfair competition for taverns in communities that allow smoking. But it also opposes the state law to make the rules uniform because it says the ban infringes on their right to smoke and allow smoking.

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